Unit .15

Session .05

God Disciplines a Rebellious People

Scripture

2 Chronicles 36:11-21

11 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. **12** He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah at the LORD's command. **13** He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. He became obstinate and hardened his heart against returning to the LORD, the God of Israel. **14** All the leaders of the priests and the people multiplied their unfaithful deeds, imitating all the detestable practices of the nations, and they defiled the LORD's temple that he had consecrated in Jerusalem. **15** But the LORD, the God of their ancestors sent word against them by the hand of his messengers, sending them time and time again, for he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. **16** But they kept ridiculing God's messengers, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the LORD's wrath was so stirred up against his people that there was no remedy. **17** So he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their fit young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He had no pity on young men or young women, elderly or aged; he handed them all over to him. **18** He took everything to Babylon—all the articles of God's temple, large and small, the treasures of the LORD's temple, and the treasures of the king and his officials. **19** Then the Chaldeans burned God's temple. They tore down Jerusalem's wall, burned all its palaces, and destroyed all its valuable articles. **20** He deported those who escaped from the sword to Babylon, and they became servants to him and his sons until the rise of the Persian kingdom. **21** This fulfilled the word of the LORD through Jeremiah, and the land enjoyed its Sabbath rest all the days of the desolation until seventy years were fulfilled.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God patiently pursues sinners, but those who harden their hearts will one day face judgment.

Option 1

Have students think of their favorite song (or at least one of their favorite songs). Instruct them they're to rewrite the lyrics of that song so that it's about rebellion. It might be helpful to clarify that you're looking for them to talk about rebellion as a general attitude or act; you're not specifically thinking of the good guys in Star Wars or any particular political or fictional group. They should have at least one verse about how rebellion starts and at least one verse about its effects. Give them some time to prepare their lyrics and then let them read them. Talk about which lyrics the group thinks best capture the essence of rebellion. Why? What connections do they see between their lyrics and the way we rebel against God? Use any connections you see or that they make to lead into the lesson of Zedekiah.

Option 2

Break your students into small groups (maybe 4-6 students in each group). Have each group come up with their favorite film or TV show that features an ensemble of characters (they could choose anything from Sesame Street to Star Wars). Each group should create a skit set in the particular film or universe that they've picked. The job of the skit is to teach the audience what rebellion is. So they're going to use Star Wars, for instance, to show and to teach what rebellion is. Give them some time to prep their skits and then to show them. Afterward, ask what similarities they saw: how does rebellion usually start? Why do people rebel? What effects does it usually have? Use this discussion to segue into the lesson of our rebellion against God and specifically Zedekiah's rebellion against God.

TEACHING PLAN

We now reach a point in Old Testament history that happens to be one of the most important events in the Old Testament era: the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of God's people. Due to the hardheartedness of the people and their leaders, as well as their continual rejection of God's Word, God displayed His justice and wrath because of the people's sins. But yet even in this display of justice, we see how God preserved a remnant of people who would carry the hope of His promise of a future Messiah.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:11-14.

Chapters 34–35 are devoted to describing the thirty-one-year reign of Josiah, Judah's last godly king. But then the author condenses the reigns of Judah's last four kings, totaling around twenty-two years, into just fourteen verses in chapter 36. Kings Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah lacked not only competency as rulers but, more importantly, devotion to God. In fact, it is said that each one did what was evil in God's eyes (2 Kings 23:32; 2 Chron. 36:5,9,12).

The last of Judah's kings was Zedekiah, who reigned for eleven years. He was a deceptive ruler, based on his interactions with foreign nations. Though he was installed as king over Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and swore an oath of allegiance by God, he only pretended to submit to Babylon while simultaneously wooing Egypt for help in defeating Babylon (Ezek. 17:11-21). Zedekiah broke his oath when he thought it suited him politically and militarily.

Zedekiah was also a prideful ruler, refusing to listen to God's prophet. As the Babylonians laid sieged to Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah counseled Zedekiah to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar in hopes of saving the city and the people (Jer. 21:8-10; 27:8-15; 38:1-3,17-18). Instead, Zedekiah believed that he knew better and allowed Jeremiah to be arrested and imprisoned (Jer. 37–38). Watching Zedekiah's reign unfold, we see that over time his pride resulted in a hardening of his heart toward the Lord. Zedekiah thought he knew best, and as a result, he failed to grasp his dependency on the Lord's counsel. Eventually he would witness the consequences of his pride.

- **Have you ever witnessed someone who had hardened his heart toward the will of God? What happened?**
- **What are some ways we demonstrate pride in our lives?**
- **What steps can we take to identify areas of pride in our lives?**

What a difference a generation makes. Judah was merely twenty years removed from the revival experienced under King Josiah. Zedekiah was around ten years old when his father, King Josiah, died. He was old enough to remember a time when a godly man ruled Judah. At that time, it would have been unimaginable for the priests to defile the temple with pagan worship practices. Yet this was the state of Judah under Zedekiah's weak leadership. Instead of giving himself over to God's glory in humility, Zedekiah pursued his own glory because of his pride. For this, Zedekiah paid a steep price, and the result of his hardened heart was Judah and Jerusalem's utter destruction.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God patiently pursues sinners, but those who harden their hearts will one day face judgment.

2 Chronicles 36

11. King Josiah is the one bright spot in the final kings of Israel. He was the last ruler who dedicated himself to the rule and reign of God, and he tried every way he knew to encourage the people to return to their spiritual heritage. Unfortunately, after his death came a string of kings marked by war and exile. Eventually, the death blow fell on the nation of Israel.

Power shifted for several years between Egypt and Babylon, and as it did, the various kings of Judah shifted their allegiance between each of those foreign kingdoms. Zedekiah was eventually installed on the throne by the Babylonians. He was intended to be a puppet ruler, but he was weak-willed. Eventually Zedekiah succumbed to the nationalism of Judah and listened to the nobles and advisors around him who told him he could rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of mighty Babylon.

14. Have you ever heard the saying "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay"? Zedekiah likely never heard the saying, but he most certainly experienced its reality. Verse 14 tells us that Zedekiah along with the priests and the people defiled the temple by engaging in the detestable religious practices of the pagan nations. We should not pass over this scene without contemplating the extent of Zedekiah's influence on his kingdom. The ramifications of his actions seeped down from the king's palace to the home of the common peasant. Even the priests, those commissioned with maintaining the temple's purity, were involved in revolting acts.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 96, DDG)

Sin as Rebellion

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-16a.

In 2 Chronicles 36:15, the author highlights God's faithfulness to His people throughout the generations. One way God's persistent love and patience was displayed was through repeatedly sending prophets (e.g., Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah) to warn Judah of the consequences of her disobedience. The author's use of the expression "time and time again" conveys the idea of a father pleading with a wayward child to turn from a destructive path. God did this out of compassion for Judah, even after their continual disobedience.

Of course, we shouldn't pass over this without considering our own lives and how God does the same for us. Sometimes God's compassion comes in the form of a friend or mentor who comes to confront us because of sin they see in our lives. The word of correction may sting, but sometimes it takes a sting to grab our attention.

- **What are some responses to a word of correction, and what might those responses reveal about a person's heart?**

The prophets told the king the truth, but the question remained: how would Zedekiah respond to God's truth? Would he persist in his hard-heartedness, or would he return humbly to the Lord, accepting the word of God from the prophets? If spiritual downfall begins with hard-heartedness, the next step on this downward spiral is our reaction to God's Word. When God's Word calls us to repentance, we can either humbly accept what He says or pridefully ignore His Word and continue on our own path. The latter was the path that Zedekiah chose, both for himself and the nation under his care.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:16b-21.

For too long, the kings, priests, and people of Judah rejected God's word. Many prophets had been sent and many opportunities for repentance were offered, but the Lord's ax of judgment was now set in motion with no recourse for stopping it. The author made it clear that the Lord brought the Babylonians against Judah. Like a tool in the hand of God, Nebuchadnezzar obliterated Jerusalem. The Babylonians' approach to war was nothing less than barbaric as they massacred the people. The godly suffered along with the ungodly. The nation was overrun with all forms of brutality. Even those who sought the protection of the temple were killed—a sign that God's wrath could not be evaded. The temple was looted and burned, the city walls were destroyed, and the king's valuables were taken as Judah reaped the evil she had sown.

God disciplines those He loves. And when God sees fit to discipline us, we must not forget that His discipline is for our good and always purposeful (Heb. 12:5-11). Also, we should never interpret God's discipline to mean He has withdrawn His salvation from us. For those who believe in Christ, God's judgment for the sin has already fallen upon Christ; therefore, God's wrath no longer remains for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Instead, God uses only faithful, loving discipline to correct His beloved children in their sin and guide them on the path of holiness.

- **How should this lesson of God's judgment of sin change our own attitude toward sin in our lives?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God patiently pursues sinners, but those who harden their hearts will one day face judgment.

2 Chronicles 36

16. Zedekiah surely did not take the crown desiring for his kingdom's demise. He likely thought his intentions for his reign were good; unfortunately, good intentions devoid of godly character never end well. Zedekiah's pride (2 Chron. 36:12) bears its fruit in verse 16 as he and the people reject God's word through His prophets. Zedekiah lacked the ears to hear God's counsel and lacked the eyes to see God's imminent judgment. The author used three harsh words in describing Judah's reaction to God's messengers: ridicule, despise, and scoff. Defining these words helps solidify the hardness of Judah's heart toward the Lord.

- Ridicule: speech intended to cause contemptuous laughter at a person
- Despise: to regard with contempt, disgust, or disdain
- Scoff: to speak derisively; to mock or jeer

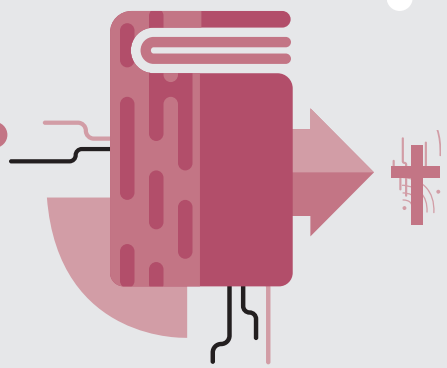
The question, however, is, "Why was Judah's reaction to God's prophets so severe and intense?" The reality is that Judah's fade into hatred toward the Lord wasn't instantaneous but more like a subtle drift into rebellion. Pride grows in our lives in the most diabolical way, imperceptibly from within our own hearts. Before we are able to diagnose our sickness, it infects our eyesight and our ability to see our own ugliness. The apostle Paul's call to renew our minds daily (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22-24) becomes all the more urgent when we consider the deceptive nature of pride.

Activity

Have the students come up with a list of professions that "fix" things: carpenters, plumbers, doctors, surgeons, mechanics, etc. Split your crew into small groups. Assign each group one of the professions from your list. Their job is to create a skit or a comic strip. Either way, the "story" starts with a client coming to the fix-it person with a problem: rebellion. The fix-it person has to identify the cause of the rebellion (e.g., the plumber might find pride clogging up the pipes) and then somehow apply Jesus to the problem before it results in God's wrath ("if this rebellion continues in your engine, the alternator is going to burn out from God's wrath, so we need to give the radiator a flush with grace"). Give them time to make their comic strips and skits and then to show them. See what points from the lesson they took away, and, wherever possible, use them to reinforce the lesson and apply them to our being less rebellious and to seeking out the rebellious to share Jesus with them.

(p. 98, DDG) Christ Connection

God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He had made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, God punished sin through His Son Jesus and made Him our King forever.



GOD DISCIPLINES A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

2 Chronicles 36:11–21

GOD DISCIPLINES A REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

God patiently pursues sinners, but those who harden their hearts will one day face judgment.

JESUS CONNECTION

God righteously punished His people for their sin, but He remained faithful to them and kept the promise He had made to David to preserve a remnant and provide a king. Ultimately, Jesus defeated sin on the cross and is our King forever.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

HUMILITY – Refusing to think of myself as more important than I am.

HEAD

Who pleaded with Zedekiah to return to the Lord? How did Zedekiah respond to this advice?

Zedekiah pursued his own greatness because of his pride. What were the consequences of this lack of humility?

HEART

If we declare that we believe in God and want to put our faith in Him, He becomes our one true God, whom we serve and follow. He is our King. Therefore, we shouldn't act like we are better, wiser or more important than God.

Are there times when you become so focused on yourself, your accomplishments, your possessions or how good you are at something that you forget God is the author of all of it?

Choose one of those things (an accomplishment, possession or talent) and write down how you could use it to serve someone else instead of getting praise for yourself.

Do you think of yourself as a prideful person? Think of a time when a teacher, coach, pastor or parent gave you some advice to help you do better or to correct what you were doing. Did you carefully listen, thank them and try to do better? Or did you get angry, roll your eyes, shrug it off and continue as you were? If the latter, how could you have responded with more humility?

HANDS

Pride is a very destructive force. Zedekiah's pride led to the utter destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Thankfully, pride does not have to control us. If we listen and apply wise counsel from others, look to serve others and remember that God is responsible for all that we have, we will be on our way to eliminating pride in our lives. Out of those three things, which one will you commit to improving? Write how you will do that.